

Conference Connection is the monthly eNewsletter of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ. You're receiving this email because you have expressed an interest in the work of the Southeast Conference. Don't forget to add [clwaldron@secucc.org](mailto:clwaldron@secucc.org) to your address book so we'll be sure to land in your inbox!

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## ***Reflections on Selma***



The Southeast Conference has an active legacy from the Civil Rights movement. As the 50th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday was observed in Selma, several of our UCC churches were present there to witness to our commitment to justice and solidarity. [Click here to see some photographs and read reflections](#) from churches in Birmingham including Beloved Community Church, and Virginia-Highland and First Congregational, both in Atlanta. We are grateful for the people who traveled and walked and prayed in memory and in the knowledge that we still have work to do.

## ***A Greeting From Our Moderator***

Spring Greetings and Happy Resurrection season! Reflecting on the new life and new beginnings that this season brings gives me a chance to offer a formal introduction to you all as the serving conference moderator.

I am so thankful and beholden to Jennifer Austin for her dedication and thoughtful service to our conference. I am also honored, humbled and mindful of stepping in to support her decision to resign from the moderator position. She has assured that she is still available - just in different way.

Our designated conference minister, June Boutwell, and I have met to carefully and prayerfully strategize on how to continue the good work that the Board has been doing under Jennifer's leadership. I feel hopeful and excited about what lies ahead. With that in mind, I am making a direct and personal appeal to each congregation, each church ministry and auxiliary and to each individual to support our most significant and top priority events and activities.

First, if you haven't heard from one our recently board appointed OCWM "ambassadors", you will hear from them soon. It is

only through the generosity and commitment of the churches and individuals in the Southeast Conference that we can do the work God is calling us to. It's been said before that "the Gospel is free to all, but doing church work costs." We have a lot on the horizon and the ongoing ministry of our conference thrives only with your giving.

The second urgent and important event in the life of our conference is the Annual Meeting. We are anticipating an inspiring and informative gathering, complete with worship, workshops and responsible attention to business. Register as quickly as possible and plan to be there. The planning committee is working hard to develop the best Annual Meeting ever. And, some of us will take the rejuvenation and forward focus to General Synod 2015.

I'm looking forward to catching up with all of you I know, and meeting those of you I don't know up close and personally soon. Peace and blessings.

Gwen Thomas



# Caring Community



We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2015. Each month, we will publish a weekly list for the month and post them weekly on our Facebook page. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

[Click here to download the April and May prayer list](#)

[Click here to see the entire 2015 prayer list](#)

Condolences for the family of Rev. Ted Braun and Donna Braun. Ted died February 23 and Donna died March 4. Prayers also for the Uplands Village community in Pleasant Hill, Tennessee where the Brauns were long-time residents. Memorial services will be held in August. Donations can be made to support the work of the Shalom Center for Continuing Education at PO Box 167, Pleasant Hill, TN 38578.

The Reverend William T. Scott, Jr. died March 19, 2015 at 85 years of age. A memorial service was held March 23, 2015 at Central Congregational United Church of Christ where he was Senior Minister Emeritus. The family asks that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to Narcolepsy Research at Stanford University or the Progressive Christians Initiative at Central Congregational United Church of Christ.

The funeral for Rev. Mitchell C. Johnson, Sr. was Wednesday, April 8, 1:00pm at Central UCC, in Atlanta. Mitch served as the Associate Conference Minister of the Conference. He also served as interim pastor of several churches including Hillside Presbyterian Church, Decatur, GA and Button Gwinnett UCC in Lilburn, GA and was a member of Central UCC. Condolences may be sent to the family care of Connie Moore, 3605 Greentree Farms Dr., Decatur, GA 30034. Memorial gifts may be made to the Chaplain Mitchell C. Johnson Memorial Scholarship, Office of Institutional Advancement, Houston-Tillotson University, 90 Chicon St, Austin, TX 78702.

Reverend Dr. Norman M. Rates passed away on Easter Sunday, only a week after giving an inspired Palm Sunday sermon at First Congregational Church, Atlanta. He would have celebrated his 64th ordination anniversary in June. His Memorial Service will be held on Saturday, April 18, 2015 at Sisters Chapel on the Spelman College Campus. The Visitation Hour will be from 11am to 12pm. The Memorial Service will begin at noon. Clergy are encouraged to robe with festive stoles and participate in the procession. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Norman M. & Laura Lynem Rates Scholarship Fund at Spelman College. For more information call 404-659-6255. Please keep the Rates family in your prayers.



Community Congregational Church in Montgomery, Alabama has called Rev. Raymond Speller to serve as Senior Pastor.

Rush Memorial Congregational Church in Atlanta, Georgia has called Rev. Michael Malcom to serve as Designated Minister for 12 months.

Prayers for Rev. Dr. Sarah Kim, Dean of PATHWAYS and Director of Theological Education for the Southeast Conference, as she begins her sabbatical on April 15. She will be traveling to Korea and Japan. See the related article on our website.

Churches in transition- Oak Grove Congregational Christian, Pine Mountain Georgia; Pilgrim UCC, Birmingham Alabama; Church of the Savior, Alpharetta Georgia; United Church, Cookeville Tennessee; Decatur UCC, Decatur Georgia; Peace Congregational UCC, Clemson South Carolina; Pensacola UCC, Pensacola Florida; Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga Tennessee; Brookmeade Congregational UCC, Nashville Tennessee; Rush Memorial Congregational UCC, Atlanta Georgia.

## ***Jottings from June***

### **TRANSFIGURATION**

Many of the members of the Southeast Conference have heard me speak about my call to serve this Conference as pastor and teacher and to lead the Conference in a process of visioning, planning, and preparing a road map for the future. My title is Designated Conference Minister because I was called to a designated term of three years.

I began my second year of that term in March. I am pleased to report that much needed administrative work has been done by standing committees of the Board of Directors and staff to place the Conference in a healthy organizational place so that we may proceed with the primary tasks I have been called to on behalf of the Conference. I am excited to begin to work with individuals, congregations, and leadership as we are engaged in the work of transformation to meet the needs identified and those that will emerge AND share the gifts of leadership and resources and creativity that are so abundant in our midst.

I am pleased that the Annual Meeting Planning Task Force is working with a three year theme arc that began last year with "For Such a Time as This" from the book of Esther. This theme provided us an opportunity to reflect on our past, present, and future. This year the theme (yet to be determined) will be based on Psalm 127:1 *"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."* We have much work to do in the Southeast Conference as we move into the future that God envisions for our churches and our ministries. I hope that as we move into this visioning process, you will add your voice and your creativity to the process. Then we will have the opportunity to honor the laborers in the vineyard next year as we celebrate our 50th anniversary as a Conference of the United Church of Christ.

I used the word transformation earlier in this article. But I have been thinking about transfiguration. Very similar ideas but the concept of transfiguration is that our very being is infused with God's presence. And that presence shines brightly for the whole world to see. As we live out Easter and our reminder that we are Resurrection People given new life, may we also see that new life as an opportunity to let our light shine that the whole world may see God's love for all creation, Christ's call to serve, and the presence of the Spirit in all that we do and say.

***Blessings, June***



### **Pray for the Freedom to Marry**

On April 28, the U.S. Supreme Court will consider the freedom to marry - which could lead to a decision that brings a national resolution on this issue. The weekend before oral arguments, April 24-26, join people of faith from around the country in a weekend of prayer in support of LGBTQ rights. [Click here to sign up your congregation today! >>](#)

### **Generosity Corner**



**Please mark your calendar with the following events!**

**2015**

**April 18 MID Committee, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN**



**Transforming Churches • Transforming Lives**  
SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

The Conference is pleased to announce the first 5 grant recipients from the Transforming Churches-Transforming Lives Capital Campaign. Recently, the Review Committee met to review applications and approve 5 grants. The church recipients and a description of their projects are listed below. The next cycle of Grant applications will start mid-September, 2015.

The following are short introductions to each project. [Click here to read more about these valuable ministries!](#)

**Beloved Community UCC, Birmingham, AL.** Their project is entitled, "Presence of God doing a new thing in Beloved Community UCC and the presence of Beloved Community UCC doing new things in Birmingham, Alabama."

**Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, GA.** Their project is to secure advertising on their local NPR affiliate radio station, WABE.

**First Montgomery Congregational Christian, Montgomery, AL.** Their program is the "Centennial Hill Community Back to School project"

**Midway Congregational UCC, Midway, GA.** Their project is to improve their technology by purchasing a new computer and systems.

**Peace Congregational, Clemson, SC.** Their project is to work with other religious groups in their area whose youth experience hostility and to begin a pilot program for adults on bullying prevention.

*Debbie Spearman, Generosity Coordinator*



**April 21 SEC Board Meeting, Online**

**April 25 Justice LED Training, Kirkwood UCC, Atlanta, GA**

**June 11-13 Pre-event and Southeast Conference Annual Meeting, Piedmont College, Demorest GA**

**June 26-30 General Synod in Cleveland, OH**

**August 8 Commission on Ministry, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN**

**October 5-7 Retired Servants Retreat, Blowing Rock Conference Center, NC**

**October 16-18 Southern Regional Women's Conference, Sumatanga Retreat Center, Gallant, AL**

**2016**

**July 26-29 National Youth Event Orlando, FL**

## Upcoming Training Opportunities



### Justice LED Training

Kirkwood, UCC in Atlanta GA is hosting Justice LED training on Saturday, April 25.

This training is offered to support local church members - laity and clergy - who wish to infuse more faith-based justice conversations, education, skills and opportunities into their respective ministries and communities. It will be led by Rev. Peter Wells, consultant for the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries and Whitney Walton.

[Click here to register on Eventbrite!](#)

### "Our Whole Lives" Facilitator Training

Looking to become an OWL facilitator for your congregation? OWL is a comprehensive sex education course for different ages from young children to adult developed by the UCC and the UUA. High Country UCC in Vilas, NC is hosting training on Friday, April 17. [Click here for more information.](#)

## 2015 Southeast Conference Annual Meeting

The 2015 Southeast Conference Annual Meeting will

PATHWAYS is proud to announce seven graduates who have successfully completed all of the Level 1 courses in a little over two years as the pilot cohort. Representing both lay and authorized local church leaders of two

UCC conferences - the Southeast and the Iowa Conference. We want to acknowledge the work of the following graduates:

**Amber Kirkendoll** - Safe Harbor Family Church, Flowood, MS

**Rochelle Lofstrand** - Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, GA

**Bonnie Dollen** - Minden UCC, Minden IA

**Dennie Kelley** - Church of Savior, Knoxville, TN

**Linda Brown** - Church of Savior, Knoxville, TN

**Ceil Sheahan** - Church of Savior, Knoxville, TN

**Kim Morris** - Church of Savior, Knoxville, TN

[To read more about the PATHWAYS graduation click here](#)



On March 6~7, 2015, PATHWAYS Faculty and Advisory Committee members gathered at the cozy surroundings of the Lake Lanier Conference Center in Buford, Georgia, for facilitator training and program visioning sessions. The leadership retreat offered a time of community building and worship, and the opportunity to share experiences and expectations related to the Conference's leadership formation ministry- PATHWAYS Theological Education.

[Click here to read more about the retreat.](#)

Also please note that Rev. Dr. Sarah Kim will be on sabbatical from April 15 to July 15. [Click here to read more about her plans.](#)

be held at Piedmont College June 12 - 13. The Board appointed Annual Meeting Planning Task Force has had their first meeting. Due to the transition in the Conference Moderator position, they are a bit behind the usual planning cycle. They have selected to use Psalm 127:1 - *Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain* - as the theme scripture. The theme of the meeting is still being decided.

The Commission on Ministry will host an authorized ministers pre-event on June 11. More material on this event will be out shortly. We hope all authorized ministers in the Southeast Conference will consider attending for a time of fellowship and a time of enrichment. The Commission will also hold a retreat for Persons in Exploration and Members in Discernment as a meeting pre-event. Those persons in authorized ministry formation will be notified of the retreat.

The Nominating Committee is seeking persons interested in serving on the Conference Board of Directors, Nominating Committee, Commission on Ministry, Finance Committee, or the Personnel Committee. Please contact [Rev. Gary Myers](mailto:Rev.GaryMyers@centurytel.net) at [gary168@centurytel.net](mailto:gary168@centurytel.net) if you are interested.

Registration information materials will be available in early April. Plan now for pastors and delegates to attend this important event in the life of the Conference.



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Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ



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